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THE Hollywood REPORTER
FILMART DAILY №1 MAR. 23, 2015

金宇彬 李俊昊 姜河那

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THE Hollywood REPORTER

MARCH 23, 2015
THR.COM/FILMART | HONG KONG | No1

HK WEATHER AND HIGH TEMPS
TODAY 72° 22° F C
TOMORROW 71° 22° F C

U.S. Pins Asia Hopes on Filmart

The Hong Kong market sees a record number of Hollywood dealmakers looking to crack the world's hottest film sector. "It's essential to attend" says one insider *By Clifford Coonan*

Hollywood-Asia links are in focus as a record 47 American companies and individuals have signed up to take part in Filmart this year.

Links between Hollywood and China are deepening: in the last week alone Huayi Bros. partnered with Robert Simonds' STX Entertainment, while Lionsgate signed a $375 million film financing deal with Hunan TV.

Hollywood companies hoping to move their projects in the region include The Asylum, IM Global, Electric Entertainment, Lakeshore International, MarVista Entertainment and XYZ Pictures, which is repping Kevin Smith's forthcoming *Yoga Hosers* with Johnny Depp at Filmart.

Tannaz Anisi, president of 13 Films, is attending Filmart for the first time.

"Hong Kong is definitely a primary way of accessing the China market given its prime location as one of the most bustling, cosmopolitan cities in the region," she tells *THR*.

Anisi

She is in the territory with two titles announced at Berlin: *Chronically Metropolitan* with Shiloh Fernandez, Chris Noth, Mary-Louise Parker and Ashley Benson and *Untot* with Hayden Christensen.

"Filmart has grown in importance over the years as Asia continues to dominate and exert its force in the international marketplace. It's now become essential for me to attend and establish a direct relationship with buyers there and understand their individual territory needs," she adds.

Filmart features a panel discussion organized by the Hong Kong Trade Development Council and the Producers' Guild of America called Making

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

KOREA'S MBC INKS *ISLAND* TV DEAL

By Clifford Coonan

Serenity Media Group's Christie Hsiao has signed a partnership with South Korea's Munhwa Broadcasting Corporation (MBC) network to make a TV series and stage musical of her novel *Journey to Rainbow Island*.

Hsiao believes the Korean deal will be a stepping stone to further sales in Asia.

The deal involves the production of a children's musical TV series, as well as a translation of the novel into Korean. The Korean language book will come out in October 2015, followed by a stage musical in the first half of 2016.

"I have always envisioned *Journey to Rainbow Island* as an international project that can reach audiences all over

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Mak's *Neon* Makes Market Bow *By Karen Chu*

Rigor Mortis director Juno Mak will unveil *Sons of the Neon Night* to buyers at Filmart. The $15 million crime thriller is produced by Mak's Kudos Films, and Hong Kong-based FC Movies, a member of the Shaw Brothers Group.

The film is written, produced and directed by Mak. Filming is planned to commence in the fourth quarter of 2015 for a late 2016 release.

Mak reinvented the Chinese "jumping vampire" genre in his directorial debut *Rigor Mortis* in 2013, and subsequently garnered nominations for best

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

REVIEW

The Taking of Tiger Mountain

In Tsui Hark's actioner, a People's Liberation Army soldier infiltrates a clan of bandits

BY CLARENCE TSUI

Military leader Lin does his best to take down a group of thieves.

TSUI HARK'S *THE TAKING of Tiger Mountain* — based on a 1957 novel about a communist soldier's battle of wits with bandits during the Chinese Civil War in the late 1940s — is a straightforward spectacle motored by high-octane action sequences featuring simplistic heroes and grotesque villains. Amid the blinding visuals and ear-splitting firepower, Tsui's adaptation stays very close to the simplistic moral binary that shaped its source material — hardly a surprise, as the director counts among his backers the August First Film Studio, the Chinese military's moviemaking unit.

SEE PAGE 10 FOR A Q&A WITH DIRECTOR TSUI HARK

Tiger Mountain revolves around

CONTINUED ON PAGE 15

THR HEAT INDEX

ANDY LAU
The Hong Kong mega star's *Love and Lost*, a tale of a man looking for his abducted son, written and directed by Peng Sanyan, opened strong in China on March 20, taking $6.4 million on its first day.

CHEN GUANGBIAO
The Chinese philanthropist and would-be media mogul, who once tried to buy *The NY Times*, is in hot water – literally – after admitting he faked a 30-minute-long Ice Bucket Challenge by using water that was "as warm as a hotel swimming pool."

KNOW YOUR DEALMAKER

FRED WANG
CHAIRMAN, SALON FILMS
Filmart regular Wang will host the working group meeting of the upcoming Asia Content Business Summit in Manila in October, where government officials and industry insiders from nine countries across Asia will discuss topics ranging from film financing and tariff issues to how to prevent online piracy.

MEANWHILE, IN THE REAL WORLD ...

- Lionsgate's *Insurgent* opened strong with $21.3 million in North America, while Sean Penn's *The Gunman* misfired with only $1.8 million.
- Snoop Dogg is developing an autobiographical drama series for HBO about growing up in Long Beach, California in the 1980s.
- Taylor Swift says she bought the domain names TaylorSwift.porn and TaylorSwift.adult to prevent them from becoming available to the public on June 1.

U.S AT FILMART

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Asian Films in America, featuring Elizabeth Dell, head of the PGA's China Task Force, and Stu Levy, who chairs the Guild's International Committee, Online Video Committee and the PGA ProShow.

The Digital Entertainment Summit will also use *Transformers* and *Avatar* as case studies in another panel, T for Transmedia: Immersive Storyworld and A New Way of Audience Engagement.

While relations are expanding, IFTA, which puts on the annual American Film Market, has been vocal in calling for China to honor the terms of a 2012 trade deal and allow Hollywood films to compete on a transparent basis.

Katie Irwin, VP of international at Fortitude International says Filmart offers useful access to the China market, which last year chalked up a 36-percent rise to reach $4.76 billion in total box office.

"There are many mainland Chinese distributors, production companies, financing entities, etc. who attend Filmart with an appetite to do business," says Irwin.

Filmart also offers valuable face time with Chinese companies that skipped the European Film Market in Berlin in Feb. The German event's proximity to Chinese New Year means many Asians don't attend.

XYZ Pictures will be shopping Kevin Smith's *Yoga Hosers* at Filmart.

"As Asia has grown, so has the competition for Asian distributors' attention," adds Irwin. "But nothing builds a better bond than taking the time to get to know them, their company and their market."

Kevin Hoiseth, director of sales at International Film Trust, says Filmart offers a look at Asian content that can travel.

"Everybody is trying to diversify in a global way and several markets in Asia are thriving at the moment. Many European and Americans come here looking for Asian content, so we also always try to keep an open eye for local content with Universal themes. Filmart is a hub for tons of new fresh material in the region," says Hoiseth.

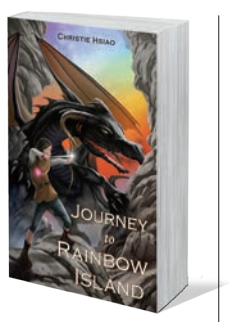
While Chinese companies are increasingly reaching out directly, Filmart remains a good place to meet investors from mainland China.

"It's important to stay up to date on the marketplace with your partners. It's also a great place to see what's working and what's not working in the region," he says.

Karen Chu contributed to this report.

ISLAND

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1



the world," Hsiao tells *THR*. "My plan is to develop digital gaming and merchandise based on *Journey to Rainbow Island*, as well as the film. With the launch of *Journey to Rainbow Island* in Korea, it is my belief that it will generate success throughout Asia."

A spokesperson for MBC said it was in talks with major Chinese film companies and distribution on a co-production based on *Island*.

The spokesperson added that the company was particularly attracted to the prospect of using *Island* as the basis for a theme park. The follow-up book will see the main female character, Yu-ning, travel to Korea and China.

MBC is considering using its links to Hebei TV in China to develop the project there because *Island* fits well with China's need for "positive, educational and inspiring content."

"Our main focus is *Journey to Rainbow Island* as a global project, not only the book, but we are also interested in other derivate works," the MBC spokesperson said. THR

NEON

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

new director at the Hong Kong Film Awards and Taiwan's Golden Horse Awards. The film grossed over $6 million worldwide, and was awarded the FIPRESCI Prize at the Golden Horse Awards.

"I've created a new world for the story. I'm attempting to re-establish the cops and robbers genre, and to redefine the boundaries of a crime thriller," Mak tells *THR*. "I'll deconstruct then reconstruct the rules of the crime thriller genre, and hope to bring a breath of fresh air into a genre that audiences have watched for decades."

With *Rigor Mortis* being a festival favorite, invited to be screened at over 30 international film festivals, including a premiere at Venice and screening in Toronto, Mak's frequent flying became a catalyst for writing *Sons of the Neon Night*. "I had the concept of *Sons of the Neon Night* before *Rigor Mortis*," says Mak, "and during the promotional period of *Rigor Mortis*, I travelled for a year and three months to festivals around the world. During these times of severe jetlag, I recommitted to the story of *Sons of the Neon Night* and decided to make it my second film. I've been writing the script since." THR

BETA CINEMA AT

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AFERIM
by Radu Jude

WINNER
SILVER BEAR
BERLINALE 2015

FESTIVAL SCREENINGS
Thu | Mar 26th | 4:45 PM | UA Cityplaza
Sun | Mar 29th | 2:00 PM | UA Cityplaza

13 MINUTES
by Oliver Hirschbiegel

OUT OF COMPETITION
BERLINALE 2015

MARKET SCREENING
Wed | Mar 25th | 12:00 PM | Theatre 1

UMRIKA
by Prashant Nair

WINNER
AUDIENCE AWARD
SUNDANCE 2015

MARKET SCREENINGS
Tue | Mar 24th | 10:00 PM | UA Cine Times House 1
Thu | Mar 26th | 14:30 PM | Theatre 2 (HKCEC)

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BETA CINEMA

Star Carrie Ng is also co-director of the thriller *Angel Whispers*.

Star Alliance and Sundream Announce Co-production Slate

By Karen Chu

Hong Kong-based Star Alliance and Sundream Motion Pictures have announced a five-picture co-production slate.

First up is the $2.5 million *Angel Whispers*, winner of the 2014 Hong Kong-Asia Film Financing Forum Award. Helmed by first-time directors Carrie Ng and Shirley Yung, the thriller is set in a building populated by prostitutes, where mysterious murders have occurred.

The second film on the slate is *Love Detective*, a $3.5 million action comedy directed by Jill Wong and produced by Patrick Kong and Shirley Yung. The 2015 Hong Kong Film Award Best New Performer and Best Supporting Actress nominee Ivana Wong plays a policewoman who goes undercover to investigate death threats received by a group of models. The film is now in post-production and will be released later this year.

It is followed by *Daughter*, a $3.5 million horror film directed by Pang Chun Chan and produced by Shirley Yung. The film stars Kara Wai as a psychiatrist whose daughter is suspected to be demon-possessed. Now in post-production, the film is scheduled for a 2015 release.

The companies are also prepping the comedy *My Wife is a Superstar* and actioner *Get A Way*. *My Wife*, a $3.5 million comedy starring Pak Ho Chau and Annie Liu, will be directed by Shirley Yung, while the $10 million *Get A Way* will be directed by Henri Wong and is set for release in 2016.

The co-production deal was initiated by Shirley Yung on behalf of Sundream Motion Pictures and Angus Chan on behalf of Star Alliance Movies (HK) Ltd. The two companies plan to co-produce three to four films a year, with the films' budgets ranging from $3.5 million to $10 million.

Sundream will handle the films' releases in Hong Kong and Macau, while Star Alliance Movies (China) will release the films in China. THR

Pegasus Has High Hopes for Yen's *Wesley*

By Karen Chu

Pegasus Motion Pictures is announcing *The Wesley* at Filmart, a $32 million sci-fi action adventure starring Donnie Yen (*Ip Man 1 & 2*), adapted from the immensely popular novel series *Wisely* by Hong Kong author Ni Kuang.

While the project is now in pre-production, filming is intended to start in 2016. The film will revolve around Wesley's investigation of a murder case involving priceless ancient treasures. The film, intended to kick start a franchise, will be produced by Pegasus chairman and 1980's powerhouse studio Cinema City co-founder Raymond Wong.

Yen

Wong

"During the days of Cinema City, we produced the most successful Wisely movie starring Sam Hui (*The Legend of Wisely*, 1987)," Wong tells *The Hollywood Reporter*. "The character of Wisely created by Ni Kuang is a little bit James Bond and a little bit Indiana Jones, with some extraterrestrial elements thrown in."

The company also has a number of productions in the pipeline, including: *Bounty Hunter*, a $16 million Hong Kong-South Korea-China co-production directed by South Korean director Terra Shin; the $9 million *Z Storm II* will see director David Lam return to the helm, and Chilam Cheung (*Triumph in the Skies*) and Vic Chou (*Saving General Yang*) joining the original's star Louis Koo; the company will team up with *The Midnight After* director Fruit Chan for *The Man With the Dragon Tattoo*, a $9.6 million crime thriller also starring Louis Koo. The film, about an undercover agent with a dragon tatoo who helps the police solve cases, will begin principal photography in December. THR

Emperor Hopes Buyers Pursue *Happiness*

By Karen Chu

Emperor Motion Pictures will be touting *The Idea of Happiness* at Filmart, a drama about an Alzheimer's patient and her friendship with a homeless young man. The film, now in production, is directed by Lo Yiu-fai and produced by Daniel Yu and Catherine Kwan, and stars Kara Wai.

Also new on the Emperor slate is *Drink Drank Drunk*, a comedy revolving around a night of celebration by three friends. Now in post-production, the film is directed by Takkie Yeung and stars Carlos Chan, Michelle Wai and Ken Hung.

Emperor is also developing *Love in Late Autumn*, a romantic drama directed by Lim Kah Wai and starring Irene Wan as a Hong Kong actress experiencing a very bad wedding anniversary. THR

EDKO BOARDS *MASTER FAT*

By Karen Chu

Edko Films will rep *Master Fat*, a $1.3 million horror film directed by Nick Cheung. The film marks the second time the award-winning actor has taken the helm, after his horror directorial debut *Hungry Ghost Ritual* in 2014.

Master Fat, now filming, is produced by One Crew Production.

Also making its market debut at Filmart is *Monster Hunt*, Edko's $40 million fantasy directed by *Shrek the Third* co-director Raman Hui. It is the live-action directorial debut of Hui. The film had a series of reshoots after the original lead Kai Ko was arrested on drug charges in China in August last year and was replaced by Jing Boran.

Also debuting at Filmart is Edko's *The Bodyguard*, directed by martial arts veteran Sammo Hung. The film stars Hung and Andy Lau as a retired bodyguard and the father of a young girl, the latter disappears after falling in with the local crime world. The film is now in post-production. THR

Phoenix Inks Asia TV Deal

By Karen Chu

Hong Kong-based television broadcaster Phoenix Satellite Television has inked deals with Singapore's MediaCorp and Malaysia's NTV7 for Phoenix's food programs *Sapor Tracing* and *Battle For Taste*, respectively.

Both programs were produced by Phoenix TV in 2014.

Acquired by MediaCorp, *Sapor Tracing* is a six-episode 35-minute series that brings the audience on a roadtrip through the countryside of China to find the most authentic local cusines. Sold to NTV7, *Battle For Taste* is Phoenix TV's first reality cooking program. Consisting of seven 35-minute episodes, the show invites cooks and chefs across China to show their cooking skills, for a chance to meet the judges after blind tastings. THR

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Finecut Pacts With Golden Network Asia

By Clifford Coonan

WAF, the writers agency of the Seoul-based international sales outfit Finecut, has formed a partnership with Golden Network Asia and announced 10 original stories at Filmart.

WAF was set up by Finecut in December 2014 to cater to an increasing demand for Korean talent in China's ever-expanding film market, and it represents the creative works of 16 Korean film and television screenwriters.

So far this year, the agency has closed several deals for its writers with prominent film production houses in South Korea.

"The China market is hungry for strong screenplays and has already recognized South Korea as its natural partner in the region," said Clarence Tang, director of Golden Network Asia. THR

THR IN HONG KONG

NEWS
Kevin Cassidy
kevin.cassidy@thr.com
+1 213 840 1896

Clifford Coonan
clifford.coonan@thr.com
+852 186 1019 3168

Karen Chu
kchuwork@gmail.com
+852 6171 3530

Gavin J. Blair
gavin_blair@yahoo.com
+852 30561013 Ext 1692#

Patrick Brzeski
patrick.brzeski@gmail.com
+81 80 5900 0233

REVIEWERS
Deborah Young
dyoung@mclink.it

Elizabeth Kerr
delizabethkerr@yahoo.ca

Clarence Tsui
clarence.tsui@thr.com

ART & PRODUCTION
Katherine Bryja
kathy.bryja@thr.com

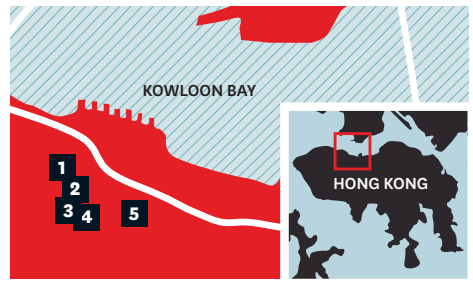
SALES
Ivy Lam
ivy.lam@thr.com
+852 6176 9272

Lily & Bloom

INSIDE HONG KONG'S HIDDEN BARS

Hidden behind nondescript doors or down dark alleyways, these five watering holes offer an intimate speakeasy-like vibe for closing that big Filmart deal in private By Patrick Brzeski

HONG KONG SUFFERS NO SHORTAGE OF LIVELY WINING and dining destinations. But the ubiquitous street-level pubs of Lan Kwai Fong, Wanchai and Wyndham Street tend to be more conducive to blasting pop music and Premier League soccer than high-level business dealings. In Hong Kong, the most exclusive establishments are always lurking behind unmarked doors or hiding on the upper floors of otherwise anonymous office towers. Here are five venues where the drinks are world-class and the atmosphere sophisticatedly cloistered.



1 001

001, Shop 1, L/F, Welley Building, Wellington St

The one Hong Kong venue that's closest to a true speakeasy, 001 sits behind an unmarked black door on a dark alleyway in the heart of the city. Ring the bell for admittance and hope that whoever's peering down through the solitary video camera in the corner likes the looks of your party. The interiors are no less discrete, with low lighting and blue leather booths offering lots of privacy. The cocktails and bar snacks are loyal renditions of the mid-century classics. Try an Earl Grey Martini and the Spicy Deviled Eggs.

2 BARSMITH

4/F, 60 Wellington Street

This member's only Japanese cocktail bar takes its mixology very seriously. Hidden on the fourth floor of a bland office building in Central, the concept is built around the customer-bartender relationship — the idea being that the barkeep will come to know your personality so well that they can suggest a clutch of signature drinks catered just to you. The impressive collection of obscure liquors and hard-to-find whiskeys promises that everyone in your party will taste something memorable.

3 LILY & BLOOM

33 Wyndham St.

Lily & Bloom can be credited with kicking off the boom in high-quality mixology that's been sweeping Hong Kong since 2010. The *Boardwalk Empire*-esque drinking den has won legions of fans with its well-crafted classic drinks and upper-floor location in the Lang Kwai Fong Tower, smack in the middle of the city's biggest party district. Less known is its sister venue, The Blind Pig, a vintage-style cigar bar tucked behind a hidden door opposite. This wood and leather-bedecked lounge offers private cigar lockers and an expansive whisky selection.

4 STOCKTON

32 Wyndham St.

Yet another centrally located venue hidden away in a blank-faced office tower down a dank alleyway, Stockton takes its inspiration from 1890s London.The bar cultivates an atmosphere of old world intrigue with dim lighting, vintage leather furniture and oriental rugs. The drinks are a tongue and cheek homage to colonial days gone by, with offerings such as "The Bitter Bitch," invented "in tribute" to Queen Elizabeth I. The bar's alleyway entrance sits on the far end of Wyndham Street, still the most happening party strip in town — it's like a trapdoor into another era.

5 THE CHINA CLUB, LONG MARCH BAR

13-14/F Old Bank of China Building

Diplomats and dealmakers have been partial to the Long March Bar at Sir David Tang's China Club since the fashion icon took over the upper floors of the historic Bank of China building back in the heady pre-handover days of 1991. A convincing tribute to chic 1940s Shanghai, this Mao-themed space is tastefully decorated with Tang's private art and period furniture collection. The room is typically bustling with finance mercenaries and political elites. It's member's only, so you'll need to score an invite.

CONTENTS PANDA

|CAST| KIM WOO-BIN, LEE JUN-HO AND KANG HA-NEUL
|DIRECTOR| LEE BYEONG-HEON

WORLD PREMIERE Buyers Only

DATE
Tuesday 24th
TIME
11:15 - 13:15
VENUE
HKCEC Theatre 2

DATE
Tuesday 24th
TIME
16:00 - 18:00
VENUE
HKCEC Meeting room N 204-205

|CAST| KIM SOO-MI, JUNG MAN-SIK, KIM JEONG-TAE
|DIRECTOR| SHIN HAN-SOL

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Tsui Hark

The Taking of Tiger Mountain **helmer discusses remaking one of the favorite films of his youth and why he hopes it gets remade again in 40 years**

By Karen Chu

"Chinese-language films will one day have a great deal of influence in the international marketplace," says Tsui.

DIRECTOR TSUI HARK'S NEW RELEASE *The Taking of Tiger Mountain* has grossed $144 million at the Chinese box office, a career best for a helmer who is no stranger to blockbusters thanks to 2011's *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*, which made $100 million worldwide, and *Detective Dee and the Mystery of the Phantom Flame*, which took in $52 million. A remake of Xie Tieli's 1970 release *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*, the story, about a soldier who infiltrates a group of thieves, is based on one of only eight "model plays" allowed to be staged during the Cultural Revolution in China (and was even turned into a concept album by Brian Eno). Shot in stereoscopic 3D, *Tiger Mountain* will have a gala screening in Hong Kong on April 3. Born in Saigon but now based in Beijing, the 65-year-old Tsui first saw the original while he was a film student in the 1970s in New York and it left a deep impression. A longtime champion of 3D technology, Tsui talked to *The Hollywood Reporter* about shooting in the snowy mountains of northeastern China, what he has learned from 3D and his part in an upcoming Johnnie To omnibus project.

You saw the original *Tiger Mountain* in New York in the '70s when you were a film student. Did it make an immediate impression on you?

The movie felt very fresh. There had never been such subject matter in Chinese cinema — about bandits and soldiers. And it was based on a true story set in a particular time and place, when most of the stories in Chinese cinema about the military were fictional. It left a deep impression on me. And the movie was very entertaining. The original Peking opera version of *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* was presented in a theatrical manner, and it had a strong entertainment value.

When did you know you wanted to remake the film?

There was a meeting of the Greater Chinese directors that took place in Hong Kong in the 1980s, and after the meeting, I had dinner with Chinese director Xie Jin (*Hibiscus Town*). He asked me whether I was interested in making a film in China, and I said yes. And then he asked me what kind of subject I was interested in making a movie about. I blurted out I wanted to remake *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*. (*Laughs.*) Then everyone at the table laughed, because they didn't know whether or not it was just a whim.

How do you think Western audiences will react to the film?

Tiger Mountain has been shown in Chinese communities in North America, and that was very meaningful to me. Decades had passed [since the original]. Many of my friends living in North America have sent me their reactions to the film and this moved me. Suddenly, it was like I went back in time to the 1970s in New York. I hope some young people, like me then, who are students or interested in film, will make another *The Taking of Tiger Mountain* in 40 years' time. It could become a cycle.

Can Chinese-language films succeed in the international marketplace?

One thing that is certain, for now, is that there is a discrepancy between the budgets and the technology in Hollywood and Chinese films. But I believe that will not remain unchanged. History has shown to be changing all the time. In the past, Westerners were in awe of Chinese civilization. They didn't know what we were, as we appeared quite mysterious to them. Once they found out that the Chinese were lagging behind after the Industrial Revolution, they started to make attempts in commercial invasion. But over the past hundred years, Westerners begin to realize that they don't have the same depth of civilization, history and tradition as the Chinese have. As film is a part of our culture, I believe that Chinese films will become one of the important forces in international film culture in the future.

BY THE NUMBERS

44
Feature films directed

$144M
Box office for *The Taking of Tiger Mountain*

3
Films shot in 3D (*The Flying Swords of Dragon Gate, Young Detective Dee: Rise of the Sea Dragon, The Taking of Tiger Mountain*)

***The Taking of Tiger Mountain* is your third movie shot in stereoscopic 3D. What kind of challenges did you encounter this time?**

All of my experiences of shooting in 3D have been very different. For *Tiger Mountain*, we shot in the snowy mountains in the northeast of China. The snowy terrain presented a problem even for ordinary shooting; if I were to ask someone to take a picture in the snow, he might sink waist deep, so deep that he wouldn't be able to get back up. To shoot a film in the snowy and icy landscape in the northern country, we had to plan the details in advance, to avoid danger and to make sure it wasn't technically impossible. It presented a complicated scenario for our equipment — the equipment wasn't guaranteed to work normally in minus 40 degrees. Another challenge for *Tiger Mountain* was to maintain the continuity of the snowy terrain, because the story entails that it was an untouched environment, so the crew couldn't leave any footprints in the snow.

Are you going to participate in the new, as-yet-untitled Johnnie To-produced omnibus film that will involve directors Ann Hui, Ringo Lam and To himself?

Yes, I am. I am participating because this film is a tribute to the medium we have used for many years: film. I believe this tribute is meaningful and necessary, so I will participate in it. As for my story in the omnibus, I'm still thinking about it. (*Laughs.*) We will all be shooting in film. It poses a challenge, as we are living at the end of the era of film. It will be quite difficult to find ways to edit, to develop and to print the film. THR

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CHAIRWOMAN, DISTRIBUTION WORKSHOP

Nansun Shi

The Hong Kong producer on Filmart's importance, supporting young directors and why filmmaking shouldn't be like making instant coffee

By Clifford Coonan • Photographed by Jasper James

"Filmart is good because it's very concentrated — in a very concentrated city," says Shi, photographed March 15 in her office in Kowloong Tong.

ASK ANYONE AT FILMART TO NAME THE most influential woman in Hong Kong and Chinese cinema today, and Nansun Shi is the name you'll hear. A key figure in promoting Hong Kong and Chinese cinema overseas for many years, Shi chairs Film Workshop, which she set up with her husband, director Tsui Hark, as well as Distribution Workshop, which she co-founded with Jeffrey Chan. As a member of the Film Development Committee, she has done significant work on developing the industry in Hong Kong from the regulatory and financing side.

Shi, 64, has been on the Cannes and Berlin main competition juries and also is a consultant at Chinese private film company Bona Film Group. She has worked on *Infernal Affairs* (which Martin Scorsese turned into the Oscar winner *The Departed*), John Woo's *A Better Tomorrow*, and *Detective Dee: Mystery of the Phantom Flame* and *Flying Swords of Dragon Gate*, both with Tsui.

Born in Hong Kong and educated by Irish nuns, Shi has a degree in statistics and computing from Polytechnic of North London and got her start at TVB television in Hong Kong in the 1970s, before setting up China Cinema Studios with partners Karl Maka, Raymond Wong and Dean Shek.

Shi spoke to *THR* about the challenges facing the Hong Kong film industry, working with smaller budgets and making inroads into collaborating more with China.

How has Filmart changed over the years? Is it still relevant?

What's been very apparent since the fast development of the industry in China is a lot of Chinese filmmakers come [to Filmart] because it's easier for them to travel [to]. In order to go to the European festivals, they have to apply for a visa. On the other hand, I think a lot of Europeans have taken the opportunity of accessing China through Filmart. You can see that the contingents from the U.K., France and various European countries are bigger. Their stands are bigger, and it's a very pain-free way for them to meet a lot of Chinese companies. Hong Kong is a very likeable city. People don't have any hesitation about coming here for a week [to] do some business, have some good food, do some shopping and have a lot of business opportunities.

It comes at the end of a busy year for you, correct?

Overall, it's been very busy. A lot of things going on, a lot of people want to talk. In these last couple of years, there's been a lot of interaction [with China]. It's not necessarily that things will be achieved, but it's part of the development. If you do the ratio of meetings versus results, there are no huge results yet. In filmmaking, serious filmmaking, it's not instant coffee — you can't just spoon it out and that's it. You need time to develop, define one another's sensibilities and what works for each market, so it does take time.

> "I'm making more of an effort to look at smaller-budget films with more interesting, novel ideas."
> SHI

How much of a presence does Hong Kong still have on the global film scene?

People are sometimes very torn between doing co-production films and purely Hong Kong films.

I think as long as we are producing more films in terms of volume, that gives more people opportunity to be more practiced in the art. I'm not saying numbers are the only answer, but if you're making very few films, it's very difficult for young talent to be involved in filmmaking.

Do you have a preferred approach when it comes to starting a project? Do you consider the idea first or do you require a script?

I always say that when you are starting a film, every single step is equally important, but once you are past that step, the priorities shift immediately. I have heard people say that the idea is important — and it is true — but once you have that idea, it's gone, no more a priority, and now I need a good script. Once you have a very good script, it's about the production, the actors, the director, the DP, whether you can capture the essence of the script during production. Then it's post-production, the editing, the sound. Overall, what's most difficult for me now is the script. Once I have a very good script, I'm 60 percent comfortable. Getting a production together is not so difficult. Our networking is much more experienced, our knowledge is much more at our fingertips. Once I have a good script, I'm not afraid of anything.

What are you looking at in 2015? What are your big plans?

I'm always reading scripts, always looking for opportunities in different ways. I always [look for [big-budget action films,] but … now that I have more resources available to me, I'd like to offer [opportunities] to younger filmmakers and try to move them along and give them some help. I'm also paying more attention and making more of an effort to look at smaller-budget films with more interesting, novel ideas.

So the big-budget action movies allow you to do the smaller movies?

I still have to do the big-budget action movies, that's my job, my responsibility, but I'm also very keen to keep actively looking for smaller-budget movies. On the slate, I have a bigger-budget movie with Mabel Cheung and Alex Law. Alex and I are producing and Mabel is directing. It's a very classic story about struggles and people who are not as privileged as others. We are paying tribute to a generation of Chinese people who came to Hong Kong in the late 1940s and early 1950s and laid down the foundations for Hong Kong's prosperity. Hard-working people, never questioning, who for the first time had a roof over their heads — our parents' generation. THR

He loved her.

JASMINE

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THE SNOW QUEEN 2
Animation
78 min
WIZART ANIMATION

DANILA KOZLOVSKIY
(VAMPIRE ACADEMY)
SOULLESS 2
Director: Roman Prygunov Camera: Pavel Kapinos
Producers: Petr Anurov, Fedor Bondarchuk, Dmitriy Rudovskiy
Cast: Danila Kozlovskiy, Dominique Pinon, Milos Bikovic, Maria Andreeva,
Alexandra Bortich, Sergey Burunov, Vladimir Simonov

SOULLESS 2
Drama
100 min
RWV

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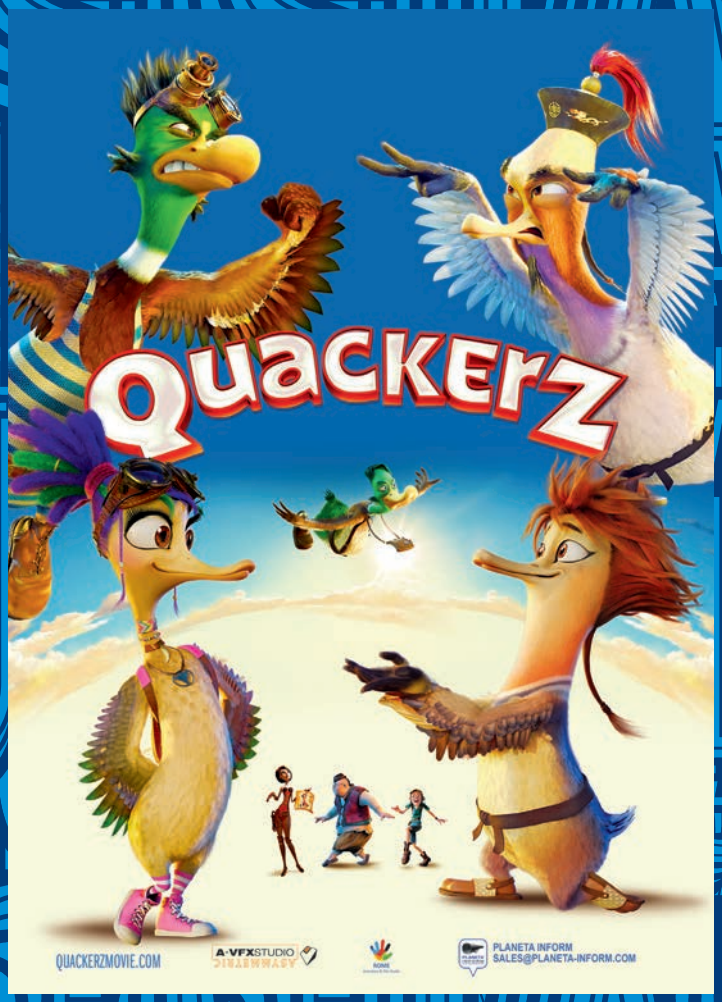

QUACKERZ
Animation/
Adventure
76 min
PLANETA INFORM GROUP OF COMPANIES

THE BIG GAME
Drama
90 min
LIGA PRODUCTION

REVIEWS

A group of bandits refuses to go quietly.

THE TAKING OF TIGER MOUNTAIN

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

a good guy trying to destroy a criminal clan from within, though the film indeed is more about an artillery-fueled assault than tactical mind games. The reliance on pomp and bluster seems to have worked in China, as the film (released mostly in 3D in the country) secured $51.1 million at the box office during its first five days of domestic release.

Tiger Mountain originally was merely a section in *Tracks in the Snowy Forest*, a novel based on a real-life Chinese Red Army platoon's missions in Manchuria after the end of World War II. The central character is Yang Ziyong (Zhang Hanyu), a surveillance officer who volunteers to infiltrate a gang of outlaws exerting regional control from a heavily fortified castle. Having found his way into the den and worked his way up the gang's hierarchy, Yang is pitted against a monstrous leader named Hawk (Tony Leung Ka-fai).

It's a shame the script doesn't provide Zhang, one of the best actors working in China today, with a more complex character to play. The possibilities on display in the first part of the film — with the character registering as a kind of unseemly rogue in a well-regimented military unit — are never seen through. Instead, the character becomes a one-dimensional stereotype just like his unit commander (Lin Gengxin), the nerdy and self-sacrificial boy-soldier (Chen Xiao) and the angelic nurse (Tong Liya).

Interestingly, *Tiger Mountain* also is a showcase for a modern Hong Kong/Chinese artist's struggle to navigate and negotiate creative freedoms within the confines of the establishment. This is manifested most explicitly in director Tsui referencing his own experience with the awkward, 2014-set sequences bookending the film: A Chinese university graduate named Jimmy (Han Geng) is seen watching, mesmerized, the 1970 film *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy* in New York, and then elects to head back home to northeast China — where *Tiger Mountain* takes place — and "reimagine" his own version of an incredible, over-the-top final showdown between Yang and Hawk. In effect, Jimmy's wild fantasy take on the tale, tacked on to the end of the film as a 10-minute coda, is very much the sort of movie Tsui ideally would have wanted to make — but, in today's China, couldn't.

Gala Screening
Cast *Zhang Hanyu, Tony Leung Ka-fai, Lin Gengxin*
Director *Tsui Hark // 141 minutes*

Little Big Master

Miriam Yeung and Louis Koo lead an engaging cast in an against-the-odds drama revolving around a run-down village school BY CLARENCE TSUI

REVOLVING AROUND THE MUCH-celebrated case of an educationalist taking up a 580-dollar-a-month job rejuvenating a decaying village school in Hong Kong, Adrian Kwan's latest film is an unflinching melodrama with an unambiguous faith in the goodness of humankind. Boasting an abundance of Kleenex-worthy moments, *Little Big Master* is an optimism-fueled film reliant more on sentimental brushstrokes than sharp social critique in presenting and understanding the tragedy and joy on screen.

What's beyond debate here is the sincerity of the filmmaker. Rivaling his real-life protagonist's empathy and ability to tease the best out of her charges, Kwan has delivered an effective and affecting tribute to the wonders of pedagogy. His two leads' suitably understated performances are nicely offset by the child actors' intensity. *Little Big Master* is bound for family-friendly domestic success amid ongoing contemplation about Hong Kong's roots and values. The presence of the classic late 1970s toddler ditty "Little Sun" and 1980s pop icon Danny Chan's legendary hit "Applause" will undoubtedly stir up nostalgia among the city's parent-age viewers too.

Continuing her recent turn toward more mature, earthier screen roles — as in last year's Hong Kong International Film Festival opener *Aberdeen* — singer-actor Miriam Yeung plays Lui Lai-hung, a headmistress dismayed by the pressure her prestigious school has put on her pupils. Quitting her job, she pledges to take a break while preparing to go on a round-the-world vacation with her museum curator husband Dong (Louis Koo). Soon bored out of her mind, Lui jumps back into action by accepting a low-paid job as headmistress of a small village kindergarten facing forced closure in four months' time.

Yeung does her best to help underpriveledged children.

What follows is nearly inevitable, as Lui tries her utmost to care for the girls and win over their skeptical — and struggling — custodians. And the kids are not alright: Siu-suet (Winnie Ho) sells scrap metal, cooks and does household chores to take care of her ailing father (Richard Ng); Chu-chu (Keira Wang) lives with her dish-washer aunt (Anna Ng) after her parents died in a car crash; Ka-ka (Fu Shun-ying) is forced to witness disputes at home between her disabled father (Philip Keung) and mother (Jade Lau), and suffers constant intimidation from local bullies; Kitty (Zaha Fathima) and Jennie (Khan Nayab), siblings of Pakistani ancestry, have to contend with their father's disapproval of girls receiving schooling in the first place.

Anthony Pun's camerawork and Curran Pang's precise editing help get the best out of the kids' raw performances, with the film's heart-rending finale — one pupil's emotionally crushing speech — captured in a harrowing long take.

Sales *Universe Film Distribution*
Cast *Miriam Yeung, Louis Koo, Winnie Ho*
Director: *Adrian Kwan*
113 minutes

The Dead Lands

Heightened performances give an epic edge to a sumptuously photographed coming-of-age tale fired by honor and revenge

BY DEBORAH YOUNG

Makoare (left) helps Rolleston avenge the murder of his father.

AN EXOTIC ACTION-adventure liberally doused in bloodshed, *The Dead Lands* (*Hautoa*) chronicles a young man's search for "repayment" after his father and tribe have been brutally murdered by savage intruders. It's a remarkable film experience in several ways. The first point is the respect director Toa Fraser and screenwriter Glenn Standring accord the Maori people and their traditions. Shot entirely in the Maori language, it creates a primal world populated by the living and the dead. Performances are intensely involving as the fiery cast, not all of whom are Maori, spit out their lines with Shakespearean passion. It also introduces a new martial art form to the screen, armed fighting with deadly paddles, in fight scenes staged in breathtaking acrobatics. The high level of testosterone unleashed in these combat sequences points to a young male audience, but the visuals and the acting are rich enough to capture the fancy of any viewer who tunes in to fantasy-adventure.

Posturing as a great warrior whose only thought is the glory that will come to him when he avenges his ancestors, dashing bad boy Wirepa (New Zealand TV star Te Kohe Tuhaka) strides into the hero's village and uses his unburied ancestors as an excuse to declare war. He and his bare-chested warriors sport long, dreadlocked mohawks and invoke neo-Nazis in their determination to kill. That night, the good chieftain is beheaded and the entire tribe murdered. The lone survivor is the chief's "stupid" son, Hongi, played with soulful melancholy by James Rolleston. To the wailing women who mourn their men, he declares his intention to kill Wirepa. Even his dead grandmother laughs at him from the afterlife: He's only 15 and notoriously unskilled in arms. But he announces he will seek the help of the monster who lives in the Dead Lands, a fearsome creature who slays anyone on his property.

The Dead Lands, which once belonged to a vanished tribe, indeed are haunted with witches and malevolent spirits. Though branded as a coward, Hongi bravely tracks down the mean, ugly, oversize warrior "monster" (Lawrence Makoare) and manages to enlist him in his vendetta. They have more in common than first meets the eye, and together they hunt Wirepa and his warriors for the rest of the film.

Fraser shows great confidence on the directing side. He may embellish Maori traditions and make his caped, bloodthirsty warriors pronounce a Shakespearean aside now and then when they address Wirepa as "Milord," but he never makes fun of these cannibals who flick their tongues out in contemptuous challenge to enemies. Rolleston makes a noble, preternaturally calm everyboy intent on his coming-of-age quest, improving in fighting skill and gaining in maturity scene by scene, until his final showdown with Wirepa.

Global Vision
Cast *James Rolleston, Lawrence Makoare, Te Kohe Tuhaka*
Director *Toa Fraser*
108 minutes

Nasty Boy

Kristen Wiig plays a woman trying to have a baby with a gay couple in director Sebastian Silva's provocative drama BY TODD MCCARTHY

WHAT SEEMS DESTINED AT THE outset to be a stultifyingly politically correct indie about a gay male Brooklyn couple — Latino and black — trying to have a baby with a single white woman turns into a startling drama of extreme moral ambiguity in *Nasty Baby.* Anyone who's seen the previous work of Chilean expat writer-director Sebastian Silva knows that he's going to closely examine what's on the underside of the rock, not just on top of it, although here he waits to turn it over until very late in the game. Pleasantly involving and sometimes annoying throughout most of its running time, this is also a vibrant, thoughtful piece about modern life in a very particular gentrified neighborhood. A small film shot in a rough-and-ready handheld style, it can benefit from co-star Kristen Wiig's name to achieve a bit of initial exposure but generally will remain limited to niche theatrical situations.

Nasty Baby is the first feature Silva has made since moving to the United States after directing two mostly English-language movies with Michael Cera in Chile, *Magic Magic* and *Crystal Fairy*. The filmmaker co-stars here as Freddy, a video installation artist who's soon informed that he should give up trying to help impregnate close friend Polly (Wiig) because his sperm count is too low. He therefore proposes that his partner, Mo (Tunde Adebimpe, frontman for Brooklyn-based band TV on the Radio), take over, a suggestion that is met with a pronounced lack of enthusiasm.

So far, this could be an episode on just about any TV sitcom today. The guys' apartment is one of those quasi-bohemian places where people are always coming and going, hanging out and playing music. Then there are the colorful local characters, notably de facto neighborhood street monitor Richard (the always welcome and wonderful Mark Margolis) and, problematically, an unpleasant older man who calls himself The Bishop (Reg E. Cathey), yells at people, is always angry and personally annoys Freddy by using a loud leaf blower every morning at 7 a.m.

Adebimpe (left) and Wiig contemplate parenthood.

But, morally speaking, the film has much bigger fish to fry. The story in its final stretch takes a very nasty left turn down a dark and perilous road to a place none of the characters ever has visited before. Silva sticks it to a comfortable, complacent and presumably morally liberal audience with his finale and twists the knife, to thought-provoking ends. If the movie at the beginning is explicitly about life and creating it, at the end it's also about just as consciously taking it away.

Sales *Versatile*
Cast *Sebastian Silva, Tunde Adebimpe, Kristen Wiig*
Writer-Director *Sebastian Silva // 101 minutes*

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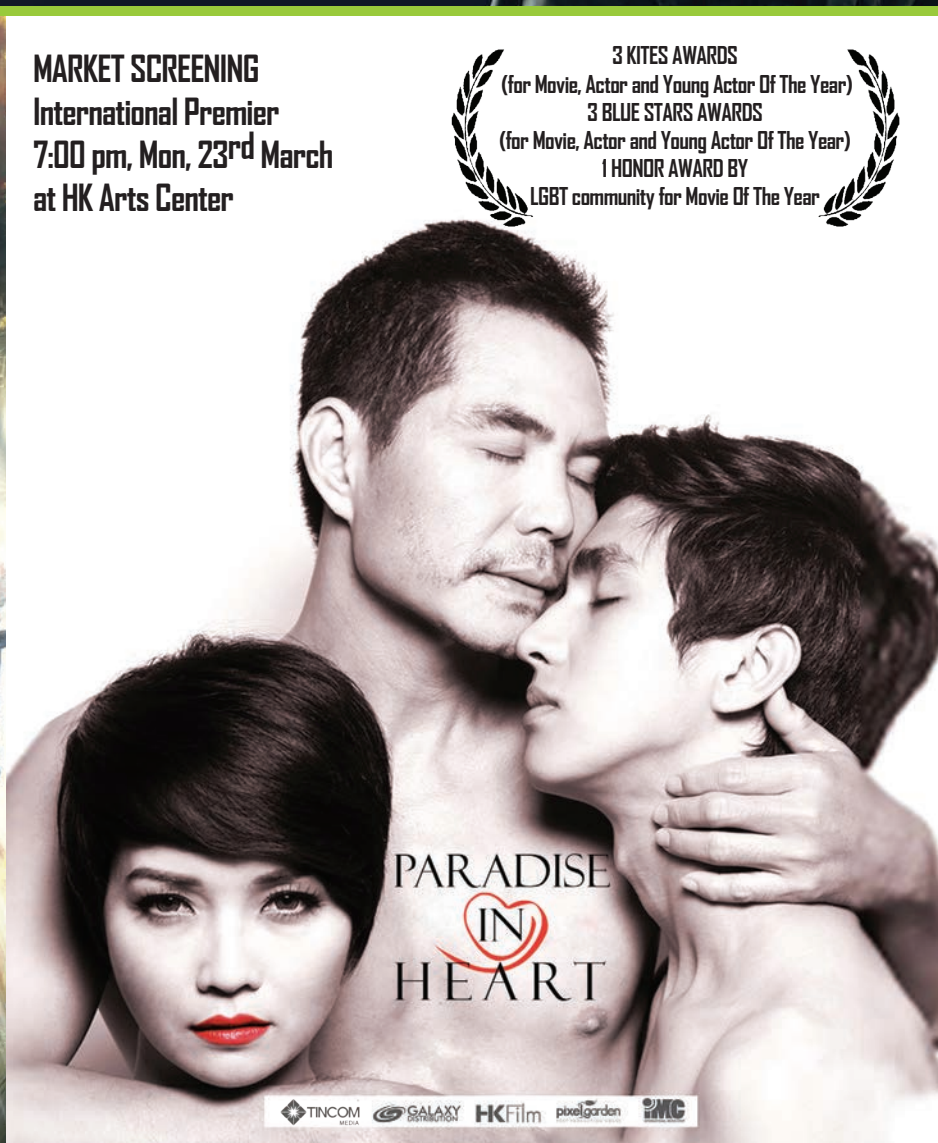

Early Spring, Kyoto

An impressive low bow to the traditions of Japanese cinema

BY DEBORAH YOUNG

AS DELICATE AS A FILM BY Ozu, who is clearly writer-director Hiroshi Toda's inspiration, *Early Spring, Kyoto* (*Kyoto, Sosyum*) is a parable-like ghost story that wouldn't scare a fly. Almost a variation on the idiosyncratic Japanese director's 2013 *Summer, Kyoto*, this tale of nostalgic spirits shows them hanging on to the living, much as the living hang on to them, until in the end everyone goes their own way the wiser for it. This reflection on death and old age should make some more inroads for Toda (*Night of Fish, Seventh Cat*) on the festival circuit and could well entertain the older art house crowd.

The soul of the film is old-timer Kenichi (Yoichi Hayashi), a recent widower who still feels his late wife's presence keenly. While he does the ironing in his one-room apartment, her ghost (Harumi Arai) hovers behind him with a loving smile. His daughter occasionally helps out in his small cafe, where he is learning to fix sandwiches alone. All this is closely observed.

All signs point to a lovely personality in this warm, masculine figure who likes to have his fortune told and is delighted when it reads "excellent." A potentially threatening scuffle with two punks unexpectedly turns to humor when Kenichi turns out not to be the helpless old man they take him for. This has been ably foreshadowed in a brief scene in which he practices some gentle martial art by the riverside, so it doesn't just come out of the blue.

There are life's mysteries all around, like an old man (Shyoji Yamada) who roams the streets joyfully feeding cats and gulls, who claims not to remember his age. One could take him for the Buddha himself. He sets the stage for Kenichi's close encounter with the dead in the long final sequence when he drives to a remote cemetery in a dark forest to inter his wife's ashes in the family tomb. There he meets his still beautiful childhood playmate Mitsuko, who looks remarkably like his dead wife. Desperately lonely, she lives with her bedridden mother who is 105. How old, then, is Mitsuko?

As in *Summer, Kyoto*, Hayashi is extremely dignified without being predictable as the old householder whose life is changed by a strange encounter. Playing the wide-eyed fellow who stares at the world in wonder, Yamada practically carries over his mystery character from *Summer, Kyoto*.

Toda rarely makes a misstep in this impressive homage to the traditions of classic Japanese cinema. Guillaumo Tauveron and Toda's black-and-white camerawork skillfully incorporates some slow motion and jump cuts to Zenlike effect. The low camera and fixed frame use this restful black-and-white palette until the final shots burst into color as though heralding springtime. Mica Toda's plaintive melodies provide a subtle accompaniment to the protagonist's inner journey.

Sales *Backstage Studio Co.*
Cast *Yoichi Hayashi, Harumi Arai, Shyoji Yamada*
Writer-director *Hiroshi Toda*
90 minutes

Hayashi (left) still feels the ghostly presence of Arai.

Giaever hangs loose on a solo hike in the hills.

Out of Nature

An office worker's nature hike is a trip within himself in this excellent look at middle-aged ambivalence

BY JOHN DEFORE

AN EFFORTLESSLY PENETRATING SELF-PORTRAIT OF the artist as a doubt-plagued middle-aged man, Ole Giaever's *Out of Nature* plunges into the stream of consciousness of a narrator whose oppressive internal monologue will be recognizable to many viewers who don't even share his specific concerns. Exploring these incessant thoughts against the backdrop of a solo weekend hike through Norwegian hills, the film captures the reality of many a day trip that's meant to clear the head but instead packs it more densely. Funny enough to entertain but serious at heart, the picture has plenty of art house potential beyond the fest circuit.

In the lead of this nearly one-man show, Giaever plays Martin, whose office job affords him plenty of time to stare out the window and imagine the monotonous personal lives of strangers. He agrees to meet co-workers for drinks on a Friday afternoon despite knowing he's headed off for a hike; later he will fret over his phone, wondering how his "I'm not coming" text should be worded in order to generate the least curiosity about his changed plan.

The fantasies we hear Martin mull in voiceover as he tromps through the countryside — of divorce, of his wife's death, of an accident that would paralyze him — are simply the work of a brain that still believes life might become more interesting than it currently is. Martin follows tangents these fantasized events suggest: Absolved of the responsibility to care for himself if he were paralyzed, he'd become grotesquely obese; then he could travel the world in a freak show, supporting his family with his earnings. And then he stops for some self pleasure behind a tree. (Here and elsewhere, Giaever is not shy about the bottom half of his body.)

Eventually the film puts some of Martin's escape fantasies to the test, interrupting his solitude in a rustic cabin. Like some of his guilty fantasies, the encounter is fraught with quiet excitement, photographed and edited with exquisite intimacy. But Martin will probably be the same man tomorrow that he is today.

Global Vision
Cast *Ole Giaever, Marte Magnusdotter Solem, Siver Giaever Solem, Rebekka Nystadbakk, Ellen Birgitte Winther*
Writer-director *Ole Giaever*
80 minutes

Bryan Greenberg

Jamie Chung

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The Forbidden Room

Guy Maddin's latest nosedive into the nether realms of cinematic esoterica is a wild, demented feast BY TODD MCCARTHY

GUY MADDIN GOES THROUGH THE looking glass, down the rabbit hole, into the twilight zone, beyond the great divide or maybe just deep into the nooks and crannies of his own two-strip Technicolor imagination in *The Forbidden Room*. Anyone experiencing Maddin for the first time with this nosedive into the nether realms of cinematic esoterica might go as stark raving mad as some of the characters who traipse through the fragmentary playlets the director has devised. But those familiar with his methods will smile and swoon at his fetishistic re-creations of storytelling modes of yore, even if, at more than two hours, it begins to feel like too much of a good thing.

The overriding obsession that has determined Maddin's style throughout his career is the transitional period between silent and sound pictures, that being the late 1920s. Silent cinema reached the zenith of its creative power at the end of its existence, but in the in-between period, primitive sound and sophisticated silent technique awkwardly co-existed, so that you might find talking sequences and old-fashioned title cards within the same film.

It's in this little-regarded pocket of film history that Maddin, who shares director credit with Evan Johnson, a young collaborator who has worked for him in various capacities since 2009, found the inspiration for his eccentric style. He uses dialogue but encourages florid silent-style gesticulating, as well as exposition via title cards, agitated cutting and any other techniques the silent masters stumbled onto. Russian montage, expressionistic German-style sets and accelerated musical tracks are, more often than not, brilliantly used in the service of telling melodramatic stories that are familiar and campy; sometimes they are delightful, even stirring, and at other times they fall flat with silliness.

The setup for *Forbidden Room* is as unexpected as a surfing exhibition in Winnipeg: The poet John Ashbery, courtesy of Maddin regular Louis Negin, holds forth in mock instructional film "How to Take a Bath." The action then moves to a submarine with a dwindling air supply in which the captain proposes that the crewmembers sustain themselves by sucking the oxygen out of pancakes.

Sequences play like shorts and the film moves between them willy-nilly, connected only tangentially by the fractured memory of Margot (newcomer Clara Furey), an alluring young amnesiac rescued from a clan of cavemen by a woodsman (Roy Dupuis). Out of nowhere come passages featuring

Sequences play out like fever dreams in the latest from Maddin.

parachuting onto an erupting volcanic island, a squid thief, a doctor imprisoned by women in skeleton outfits, Udo Kier getting a lobotomy to cure his butt-pinching habit and a typical silent film blind mother.

With no through-story to hold it together, the film does become repetitive; it's hard to remain stimulated by the same techniques, however imaginative, without some connective

End of Winter

An astute, if somewhat cold, family drama takes an understated approach in portraying discontent

BY ELIZABETH KERR

BRINGING NEW MEANING to "awkward family photos," Kim Dae-hwan's debut is an assured, if occasionally labored, exercise in uncomfortable family dynamics rooted in the simmering resentment and repressed rage that only families can engender. Unfolding over two snowy nights in a small Korean town, *End of Winter* suffers from too much wasted space and misunderstanding of when long is too long, but ultimately overcomes those minor flaws to deliver a keenly observed portrait of a family living in a communication vacuum and how that leads directly to an irreversible tipping point.

Following his retirement ceremony from teaching school

Lee Young-lan (left) and her daughter-in-law Lee Sang-hee feel the tension.

in provincial Cheorwon, Kim Seong-geun (Moon Chang-kil) announces he plans on getting a divorce. Why is a mystery to his family, particularly his nagging, oblivious wife (Lee Young-lan).

Nothing really happens in *End of Winter*; there's no shocking revelation or long-held grudge that emerges to drive the story forward. But the simple observations and little details of Korean social and familial protocols make up for a lack of action and play a significant part in the story. Kim's eldest son, Dong-wook (Kim Min-hyeuk), is in pharmaceutical sales, and things may not be going that well for him. His wife, Hye-jeong (Lee Sang-hee), spends most of her time going overboard trying to please her hypercritical mother-in-law. Su-hyeong (Hur Jae-won), the youngest, is distanced both by years and mentality from his family and can't grasp the so-called shame of the situation. And Seong-geun's wife lords over them all, alternating between spitting snob and put-upon matriarch.

Through it all, Seong-geun himself says next to nothing, and his motivations are never fully explored. His baffling decision inspires confusion but never discussion, leaving room for interpretation. As time ticks by, the initial branding of Mom as a typically demanding *ajumma*, Hye-jeong as a spineless pushover and Su-hyeong as the entitled baby are swept aside. Time also brings deeply buried frustrations, anger and blame to the surface in everyone, leaving us to wonder if Seong-geun hasn't committed a selfless act whose consequences will be positive in the long run.

End of Winter is astute, but it's also dispassionate in its observations. The cast is uniformly strong and the film is technically polished, with Kim and cinematographer Kim Bo-ran's suffocating steel gray palette adding to the overall reflective tone without overwhelming it.

Indie Power
Cast *Moon Chang-kil, Lee Young-lan, Kim Min-hyeuk*
Director *Kim Dae-hwan*
102 minutes

dramatic tissue. Still, for cinephiles and aficionados of the singular, *Forbidden Room* represents a very particular kind of feast.

Auteurs
Cast *Louis Negin, Charlotte Rampling, Roy Dupuis*
Directors *Guy Maddin, Evan Johnson*
132 minutes

DIRECTOR Q&A

Guy Maddin

Canada's king of quirk on still learning to make movies, those walkouts in Sundance and using color to 'break people's brains'

BY ETAN VLESSING

***The Forbidden Room* has been described as another homage to films of the silent era, to lost cinema. How would you describe the work?**
I don't think it's the same old thing. I think people coming to this movie, if they were familiar with my earlier work, might suspect this is something by me. But I'm still learning how to put together pictures the way I want to see them. There's some interesting developments, ones everyone is used to. It's in color, and there's lots of dialogue. I wanted to throw the kitchen sink at viewers with this one.

Wouldn't tossing a skillet have been enough?
No, I wanted to overwhelm. I wanted there to be too much narrative. It's not for me to say what the movie is about. One of the things it seems to supply is a lot of narrative and a lot to keep track of. There's stories within stories within stories, Russian doll-style. I just wanted there to be too much. I wanted to give people their money's worth. I wanted the color palette to break people's brains.

There were reports that half of the audience walked out of your Sundance world premiere for *Forbidden Room*. Did that alarm you?
I'm not ashamed of walkouts. It's probably the melodramatic acting style and that the world isn't realistic-looking. Even superhero movies seem to be more grounded in a less theatrical, less artificial world than mine. So I long ago braced myself for walkouts. And the walkout rate was about 10 to 15 percent at the [Sundance] screenings. The writer who started this [walkout] story wasn't at the screening. She just heard me joking about the walkouts and decided to add the ratio as half. I don't want to shut people out. I just want to tell a story, and I felt that those people who stayed had no problem following the film.

Was the opposition a result of the Sundance festival itself and the type of movies it tends to screen?
I kept being told by people who wanted to make me feel better that it's not a typical Sundance film. Which is just fine that it's not a typical Sundance film. There's too much subversion of film vocabulary going on. And a lot of people didn't get that. I don't know. Maybe there will be an 80 percent walkout in Berlin. I'm not going to complain about the [Sundance] festival. I like Sundance. Everyone was wonderful there. THR

From left: Costa, Lau and Rogowski get up to no good.

Victoria

Sebastian Schipper's competition entry is an audacious heist thriller shot in real time in a single take on the streets of Berlin

BY STEPHEN DALTON

FILMED IN A SINGLE mobile shot lasting more than two hours, director Sebastian Schipper's competition entry *Victoria* is a dazzling experiment that largely pays off. Rising Catalan star Laia Costa plays the eponymous heroine, a young Spanish exile looking for thrills in Berlin. She soon finds herself out of her depth. Barely an hour after meeting on the street, a gang of criminals enlist Victoria to help them commit an armed bank robbery in a chaotic haze of booze and drugs. What could possibly go wrong?

Padding out a 12-page script with improvised dialogue, *Victoria* takes a while to emerge from its fuzzy-headed, free-wheeling first act. But it repays our patience when it shifts gears from talk-heavy Eurodrama to heart-racing, adrenaline-pumped heist thriller. With one foot in the indie margins and another in the multiplex mainstream, commercial prospects could be healthy.

Victoria dances among the strobe-blasted bodies of a techno club in Berlin. With dawn approaching, she leaves for work at a cafe, but runs into Sonne (Frederick Lau) and his pals Boxer (Franz Rogowski), Blinker (Burak Yigit) and Fuss (Max Mauff). Falling into flirtatious conversation, Victoria joins the boys to drink and smoke weed.

Unfolding in real time, the conversation initially feels random, but builds to a prearranged meeting with gangster Andi (Andre Hennicke), who makes an offer they can't refuse. Boxer owes Andi a favor from their shared time in jail, so now he must repay him by robbing a bank. The heist goes smoothly, but the aftermath is a crescendo of mistakes and disasters.

Costa gives a committed performance, sacrificing some of her pixie-ish fashion-model beauty to sweaty, spittle-flecked realism. An emerging force in German cinema and television, 25-year-old Lau is no pinup but he radiates a cocksure charisma reminiscent of a young Brando.

Victoria is not the first movie with a single-shot conceit, but many previous examples have used visual sleight of hand, from *Rope* to *Birdman*. Even if Schipper's thriller essentially is one long technical stunt, it's a bravura experiment and a kinetic, frenetic roller-coaster ride.

German Cinema Now
Cast *Laia Costa, Frederick Lau, Franz Rogowski*
Director *Sebastian Schipper*
140 minutes

Coroy is set to be married but has a guy on the side, just one of the many predicaments she faces.

Ixcanul

Rumblings of talent distinguish this low-key but promising debut about a teen girl's transition to womanhood in rural Guatemala BY NEIL YOUNG

LOVERS OF LAVA-SPEWING GEOLOGICAL SPECTACLE may be disappointed by Jayro Bustamante's assured debut *Ixcanul*, as from start to finish the writer-director boldly resists showing a full view of the eponymous peak. But nonvulcanologists will find much to like about this sensitively handled tale of a teenage girl's halting progress to womanhood in a remote, dirt-poor village in western Guatemala. A solid example of low-key, well-observed, humanistically sympathetic ethnography, the French co-production likely will find plenty of festival bookings over the coming months.

Bustamante's camera opens with and often lingers on the face of his nonpro lead, Maria Mercedes Croy. Croy's visage in repose has the impassivity of an African tribal mask — and even in states of emotional extremis, there's always something intriguingly guarded about this young woman as she finds her place in a complicated world.

Maria is the only child of Juana (Maria Telon) and Manuel (Manuel Antun), the trio eking out a living working on a coffee plantation on the slopes of a rumbling, presumably dormant volcano. Juana and Manuel's priority is to get their daughter married off, and they arrange an engagement with their overseer Ignacio (Justo Lorenzo). Maria seems to accept this development, but nevertheless sneaks off for trysts with Pepe (Marvin Coroy). When she becomes pregnant, this spells trouble for all concerned.

When the action relocates temporarily to a nearby city in the final third, the sudden appearance of modern technology is jarring — and the extent of the family's deprivation becomes apparent. With no running water, no reliable electricity, unable to read or write, speaking no Spanish — only the Mayan language Kaqchikel — they are easy prey for exploitative employers and rely heavily on superstition to help them through problems minor and major.

Most pressing of these is an infestation of snakes that menaces the livestock on the family farm, location of one of those unsimulated animal-slaughter sequences that apparently is de rigueur for all low-budget rural pictures from Latin America these days.

Bustamante's visuals have a consistent, entrancingly classy depth and sheen thanks to the celluloid-like beauty of experienced DP Luis Armando Arteaga's wide-screen cinematography. Further deepening the sensory appeal of *Ixcanul*, farm noises, indigenous music and the volcano's near-incessant rumblings are conjured into an impressive, organic soundscape by sound designers Eduardo Caceres and Julien Cloquet.

Global Vision
Cast *Maria Mercedes Croy, Maria Telon, Manuel Antun*
Writer-director *Jayro Bustamante*
91 minutes

Tough Love

Cult filmmaker Rosa von Praunheim's latest is a campy yet compelling docudrama about a victim of sexual abuse who later became a karate champ and pimp BY JORDAN MINTZER

A GERMAN PIMP WITH A penchant for violence. A prostitute with a heart of gold. A demented mother. Lots of depressing sex scenes set in dreary working-class apartments.

If these seem like the key ingredients of a Rainer Werner Fassbinder movie, they're in fact part of a true story that inspired the latest docudrama from prolific Berlin-based filmmaker and gay activist Rosa von Praunheim (*Rent Boys*). Based on the harrowing life of Andreas Marquardt, a victim of sexual abuse who grew into a karate champ, prosperous hustler, federal prisoner and, eventually, martial-arts instructor and author, the film jumps between present-day interviews and kitschy flashbacks shot in black-and-white, revealing a man who overcame trauma through therapy and his own two fists.

Tough Love should play well with the filmmaker's local fan base and cult followings abroad, with continued gigs on the international fest circuit.

Adapted by the director and writers Nico Woche and Jurgen Leme from Marquardt's 2006 autobiography, the film begins with its subject speaking candidly about his past, before jumping into dramatized re-creations where young Andreas, a.k.a. Andy (Hanno Koffler), is raised by a single mother (Katy Karrenbauer) after his abusive father is kicked out of the house.

But rather than finding solace in the arms of *Mutter*, Andy lands between the legs of a perverted Mommie Dearest who forces him into an incestuous relationship — one from which von Praunheim hardly shies away, capturing sexual acts from the boy's POV as his mom strips down for him, plays with his genitals or, in one rather unbearable sequence, lubricates a dildo like she's spreading icing on a tray of cupcakes.

To say Andy had an unhappy childhood is more than an understatement, and he soon grows up to become a fierce fighter and street enforcer, eventually setting up shop as a pimp in what he would call his personal "I Hate Women" campaign. Yet despite his outward loathing of the opposite sex, one woman pops into his life with the possibility of changing it: 16-year-old secretary Marion (Luise Heyer), who soon falls in love with Andy, only to become one of his streetwalkers.

Koffler (left) plays the real-life Marquardt, whose troubled life is the subject of *Tough Love*.

Much of the film's midsection depicts the push-and-pull between pimp and prostitute, and in that sense recalls Fassbinder's *Love Is Colder Than Death*, especially with its stark, colorless imagery (by Nicolai Zorn and Elfi Mikesch) and faux theatrical backdrops. Some of these scenes veer into camp, especially when Mom pops back into the picture, but stars Koffler (*Free Fall*) and Heyer (*Jack*) offer convincing, intensely physical performances, playing two self-punishing people finding their way toward true love.

If the last act is less visceral as it follows Andy's quest for psychological aid, *Tough Love* works as a portrait of a man who was able to channel his rage into a lucrative, if highly questionable, existence. It's obviously not easy for sexually abused kids to surpass their childhood suffering, and in that sense, Marquardt — who now runs karate schools for inner-city youths — can be seen as a hero, and one who still kicks ass.

German Cinema Now
Cast *Hanno Koffler, Luise Heyer, Katy Karrenbauer*
Director *Rosa von Praunheim*
89 minutes

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Contact: UNITED STATES | Debra Fink | debra.fink@thr.com
EUROPE | Alison Smith | alison.smith@thr.com // Tommaso Campione | tommaso.campione@thr.com
ASIA | Ivy Lam | ivy.lam@thr.com // AUSTRALIA/NEW ZEALAND | Lisa Cruse | lisa@spiritedmedia.co.nz

Yan and Chang promoted *Rice Rhapsody* in Hong Kong in 2005.

In 2004, Chang Served Up *Rice Rhapsody*

TAIWAN-BORN ACTRESS, director, producer, screenwriter and musician Sylvia Chang has had the sort of prolific four-decade movie career that James Franco would envy, appearing in nearly 100 films, including Ang Lee's 1994 family drama *Eat Drink Man Woman* and 2004's *20 30 40*, which she wrote, directed and starred in. In 2004, she also starred in the Hong Kong indie *Rice Rhapsody* as a restaurateur who invites a female French exchange student (*Inglourious Basterds*' Melanie Laurent) into her home because she fears her son might be gay. Her co-star, Martin Yan — best known as the host of public television's *Yan Can Cook* — signed on with little acting experience, but Chang took him under her wing. Says Yan, 66, who played a competing restaurateur: "The first thing I said was, 'I don't really know how to act. I can only be myself.' She said, 'Well, that's the best way to do [it].' She was very comforting, very nurturing, very friendly and receptive."

She also was tenacious. "We were filming long hours with very little sleep," says Yan. "At one point she actually fell [down a stairwell] from the third floor almost to the first, but the next day she performed and didn't show any pain."

Now 61, Chang is married and has a son, Oscar. Her private life was thrust into the spotlight in 2000 when Oscar, then 9, was kidnapped and held for a $2 million ransom. Although he was returned unharmed and the kidnappers arrested, Chang later told CNN the incident made her weaker, "in the sense that you don't trust this world as much as you used to trust it before." Her latest directorial effort, *Murmur of the Hearts*, opens the Hong Kong Film Festival on March 23. She also will discuss her life and work during a "Face to Face" seminar April 5.

— ELIZABETH ISENBERG

'Rice Rhapsody'

HONG KONG — "Rice Rhapsody" is Hong Kong indie director Kenneth Bi's breakout to mainstream filmmaking, but it is destined to be remembered as TV chef Martin Yan's break into film acting. The "Yan Can Cook" host makes his movie debut as — no surprise — a cook in this food-themed

film

BY ANDREW SUN

opens Thursday, Jan. 20 (Hong Kong)

the bottom line

son Leo (Tan Lephang stays "straight," Jen an Kim Chui hatch a plan t take in an attractiv French exchange studen (Melanie Laurent) and hope her feminine charm will tempt Leo away fro hanging around his be friend/cycling budd The youth, though, is f from enchanted by th free-spirited Gallic vege tarian who has ta

LOSAI HUNG/AP PHOTO.

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Contact: UNITED STATES | Debra Fink | debra.fink@thr.com
EUROPE | Alison Smith | alison.smith@thr.com // Tommaso Campione | tommaso.campione@thr.com
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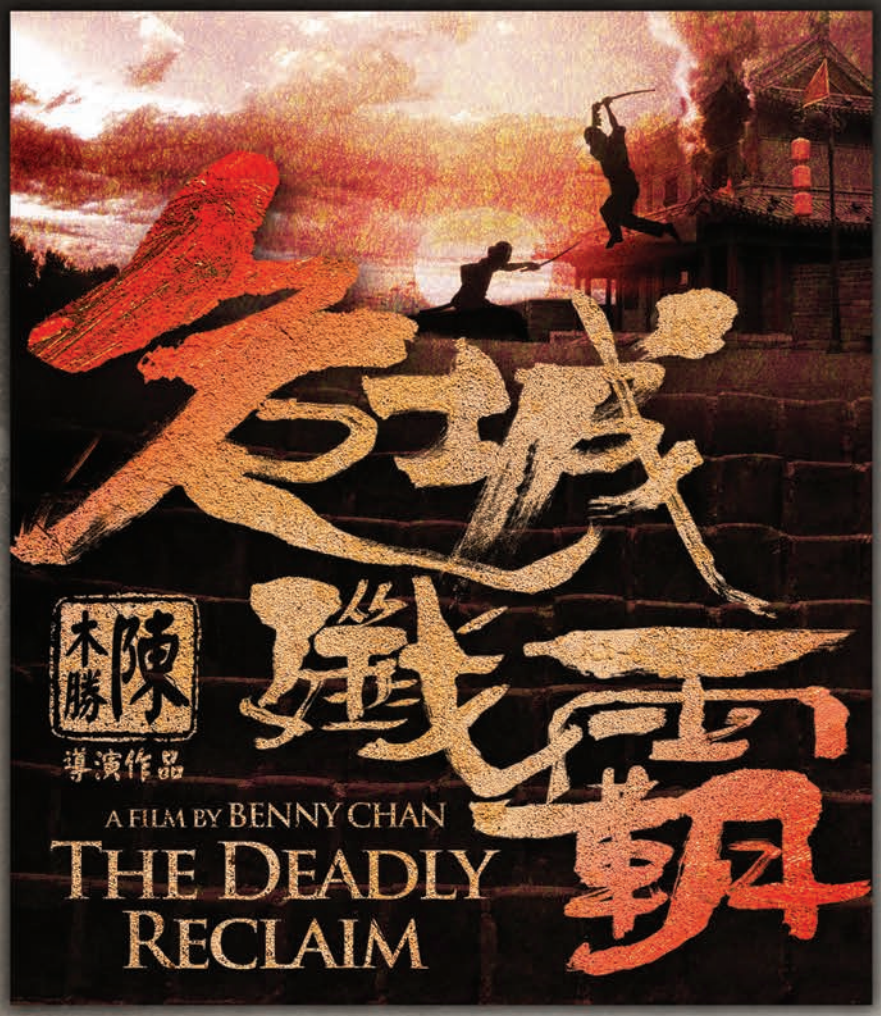

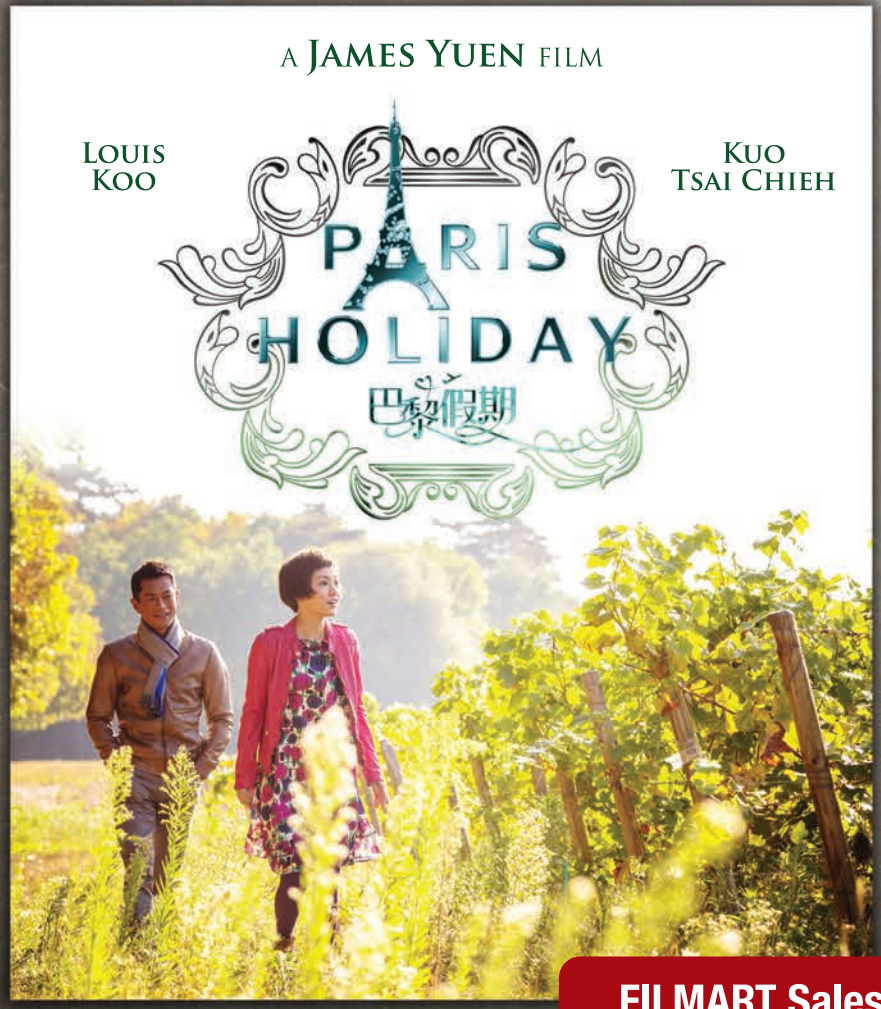

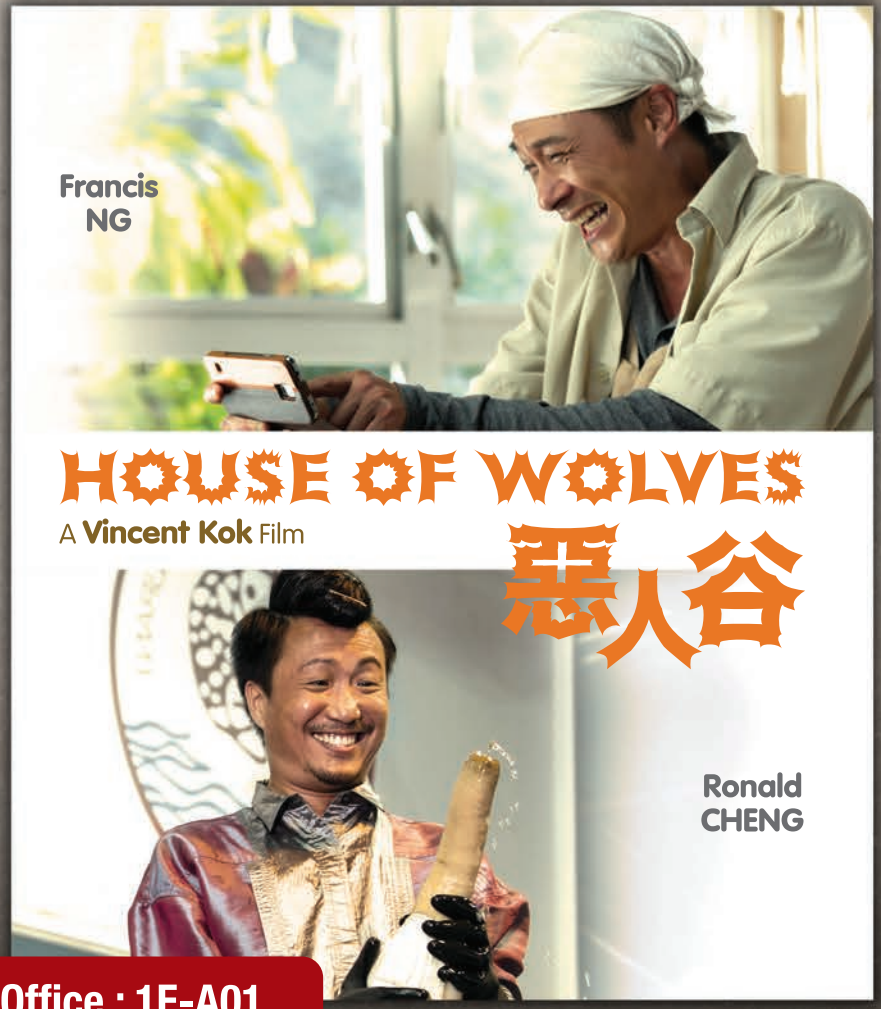

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